

The Autobiography of a Catholic Anarchist (1954) - Ammon Hennacy

Ammon Hennacy recounts the story of a home visit as a social worker:

He was a huge man...He locked the door, drew down the blind and took up a butcher knife and made at me. I was sitting at a table and did not get up. He said that he would carve me up if I did not mark down the groceries; that he had locked up two other relief workers in disputes and had always got what he wanted even if he had to do time in the workhouse afterward. He called me all the vile names he could think of. I knew if I answered to this description I should take it and if I did not, then his recital of the vile names would not make it true. He would prance around and swing his fist at me to frighten me and breathe down the back of my neck and tickle me with the point of his knife. I was not frightened for I had learned in solitary not to be afraid of anything. This went on for nearly an hour. I did not answer back a word nor hang my head but looked him in the eye. Finally he came after me more energetically than before and said I had to do something. I got up and said: "I will do something, but not what you think." I reached out my hand in a friendly manner saying, "You are all right but you forget about it. I am not afraid of that false face you have on. I see the good man inside. If you want to knife me or knock me cold, go ahead. I won't hit you back: go ahead, I dare you!"

For three minutes by the clock which faced us on the wall he shook my hand, and with the other hand was making passes to hit me in the face. I did not say anything more. Slowly his grip loosened and he went to the door and opened it, pulled up the blind and put the knife away.

"What I don't see is why you don't hit back." "That's just what I want you to see," I answered.

"Explain it," he demanded.

"What is your strongest weapon? It is your big fist with a big knife. What is my weakest weapon? It is a little fist without a knife. What is my strongest weapon? It is the fact that I do not get excited; do not boil over; some people call it spiritual power. What is your weakest weapon? It is your getting excited and boiling over and your lack of spiritual power. I would be dumb if I used my weakest weapon, my small fist without a knife, against your strongest weapon, your large fist with a knife. I am smart, so I use my strongest weapon, my quiet spiritual power, against your weakest weapon, your excited manner, and I won, didn't I?"

"Yes, tell me again," was his quiet request. I explained it again and told him how I learned my lesson in solitary.

...if I had told him, "Don't hit or knife a good Christian anarchist who returns good for evil..." he would have laughed at me. When I showed no fear and dared him to do me up it woke him up to reality and took his

mind off his meanness. The good was in him the same...but it had to be brought out by the warmth of love which I showed and not by the blustering wind which provoked only more bluster.

"Do you want those groceries?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" he said in astonishment.

"I mean that the door is not locked and the knife is put away. I'll give you the groceries now and skip them next time; all in the same month's bookkeeping." "Well, I'll be damned," was his reply. Adding "And when do I go to court?" "You won't go to court. I don't believe in courts; you have learned your lesson." When I left the house my knees were shaking from the strain although I had not wavered a bit all along.